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ABSTRACT

The energy crunch is being felt by everyone--at home, at work, and in the pocketbook. Schools, like others, are sharing in the efforts to conserve energy; thermostats are being turned down and lights are being turned off. Always in the vanguard of patriotism, schools throughout the country are among the first to initiate cutbacks in fuel and electricity to share in alleviating the crisis. The question of what more can be done, however, continues to perplex school principals and other administrators. Something "more" can always be done, it seems, but the time comes when the practical must be weighed against the impractical, and when some serious questions must be asked about priorities and values, and where education and the schools rank among them. A number of the important questions are presented here. (Author)

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A Legal Memorandum

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THE ENERGY CRISIS

Surfacing rather quickly to the foreground of issues affecting America's schools in the past few weeks has been the critical shortage of fuel, brought sharply into focus by the curtailment of oil imports from Arab nations. What can be done by the schools is a question many educators are now asking. This paper urges educators to raise the right questions and not to make wrong decisions because of inadequate knowledge.

The energy crunch is being felt by everyone--at home, at work, and in the pocketbook. Schools, like others, are sharing in the efforts to conserve energy as thermostats are being turned down and lights are being turned off. Always in the vanguard of patriotism, schools throughout the country are, and continue to be, among the first to initiate cutbacks in fuel and electricity to do their part in alleviating the crisis.

The question of what more can be done, however, continues to perplex school principals and other administrators. Something "more" can always be done, it seems, but a time is reached when the practical must be weighed with the impractical; a time is reached when some serious questions must be asked about priorities and values, and where education and the schools rank among them.

Will Education Be Sacrificed?

Some government and school officials in their enthusiasm to offer programs of energy conservation have taken steps to extend school vacations, to shorten the school day, and to initiate the four-day school week. It's ironic that one governor on the same day ordered the closing of schools for three days while extending night horse racing for 18 days.

Interesting to note is that all through World War II, when shortages were more severe than now and when Americans were asked to sacrifice considerably more than fuel, schools and their educational programs were not restricted at all.

An editorial in The Washington Post summarized the issue concisely when it said, "Closing down schools ought to be one of the last ways to save fuel and not, as it in fact seems to be turning out, one of the first."

EA 007 285

It continued: "We pass an unflattering judgment upon ourselves if we shut the schools while every other kind of public facility--stores and theaters, bars and bowling alleys, offices and all the rest--keep rolling merrily along. There is one obvious principle that ought to guide us in the difficult decisions over conservation: *the best places to save fuel are those where the effects will be least permanent.* (Italics added) If we are cold this winter in our homes and offices, springtime will remedy it. But if our children's school year is chopped up by bizarre and unfamiliar schedules, the deficit will be cumulative and the arrival of warm weather will not cure it."

A similar point of view was expressed early in November by NASSP's Board of Directors. While urging a sharp reduction in the use of student cars in the nation's high schools, the Board added that the country's principals would take "a dim view of cutting an already too short school year."

Rushing into programs to conserve energy without adequate thought can be self-defeating. Witness the fact that industry, without regard for the product manufactured, has been given top priority for its fuel needs. Hence auto manufacturers are not slowed up one iota as they produce more and more vehicles that consume large quantities of fuel. Another example, more appropriate to school people, is the cutback on fuel for school buses, with the likely result that more individual cars may be driven.

Asking the Right Questions

The examples are innumerable, but one thing is clear: school principals and administrators must ask the right questions before they launch an energy conservation program. To do so will ensure that their schools in fact are conserving energy, not consuming it at a faster rate or endangering the quality of education.

Some of these questions include:

(1) Have you had a heating engineer and an electrical engineer analyze your school building's (system's) situation regarding temperature and lighting control? They can tell you, for example, how low a water heater can be set to actually conserve fuel during a weekend before expending all that was saved in the re-heating process.

(2) Have you requested cost and usage data on heating and lighting for the past couple years from the school system's business office to use as a baseline or standard for the current year?

(3) Have you appointed a staff committee to examine and set school building priorities for use of fuel and electricity?

(4) Have you encouraged leaders in your local community to appoint a committee to recommend priorities for the community?

(5) Have you determined what occurs when schools are closed or school days are abbreviated? Do theaters, bowling alleys, etc., all stoke up the

2/

furnaces to accommodate the increased trade? Have non-essential recreational and business activities been cut back before schools have been required to close?

(6) Have you sought data to enable you to compare your school's fuel consumption with that used by the local shopping centers, the automobile dealer, etc.?

(7) Have you conducted training sessions on conservation for teachers and students? Are you using teachers who are already technically trained by virtue of degrees in science, etc., as consultants?

(8) Have you carefully weighed the short-term benefits with the long-term disadvantages? Are proposed solutions educationally sound and realistic methods of conserving energy?

(9) Have you expressed your opinion to government officials (local, state, and national) who will be issuing directives based on input received from persons in the field? Have you volunteered to serve on an energy commission to ensure that the needs of education and schools are heard?

(10) What alternatives have you devised? Is consolidation of an adult evening program a more suitable option to a complete shutdown of the program?

(11) Have you checked local and state regulations on safety to ensure your compliance with laws and ordinances?

(12) Have you determined whether increased use of buses cuts down the use of individual cars by students? Have you determined whether faculty members are permitted to ride school buses to their schools rather than drive their individual cars?

Rules and Regulations

The U.S. Congress on November 27, 1973, enacted the Emergency Petroleum Act, which gives the President broad general powers to control the allocation of gasoline and fuel oil throughout the country. It was under these powers that regulations were initially drawn designating priorities for the use of these resources. In the original regulations, schools were not mentioned specifically, and were later determined to be grouped with general government and commercial uses. This would have restricted fuel oil consumption to a level requiring a reduction in school temperatures of 10 degrees.

After comments were received on the original regulations, revisions which have just been published mention schools and group them with residential buildings for the purpose of establishing heating priorities. Under the revised regulations, fuel supplies will be provided at a level requiring reduction of temperature by only six degrees.

A more detailed law, entitled the National Energy Emergency Act has now been passed by both houses, but important differences between the two versions

3/

must be compromised in conference before the bill can be sent to the President for his signature. The House version would raise the priority of schools to that of "vital services" such as hospitals and fire stations, but quick enactment is uncertain. One argument expected to be a major cause of delay is the proposal in the House bill to reduce school busing being carried on for desegregation purposes.

Local Contacts To Be Established

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare has assigned full-time energy policy coordinators to each major division, and will shortly designate counterpart coordinators in each regional HEW office. Their function will not only be to disseminate information on the energy situation, but also to receive complaints, suggestions, and requests from educators for help with energy resource problems.

Until regional coordinators are named for the Office of Education, contact should be made with Dr. John Baird, Energy Policy Coordinator for the Office of Education, Washington, D.C., telephone (202) 245-7953.

In many states, legislatures are also drafting amendments to school codes or conferring emergency powers upon governors to enable them to authorize actions to meet the crisis. Many of these actions will affect schools, such as reductions in the number of school days required. State governments should be advised to consider such reductions carefully, as they might result in violations of minimum requirements set by regional accrediting organizations.

Many school districts are also considering the adoption of voluntary energy conservation measures. Principals and other secondary school administrators will normally be informed of these, as well as applicable state and federal requirements through directives from the school board or central office; but secondary school administrators should be aware of the general considerations involved in energy crisis decisions, and should be certain that their educational concerns are represented to energy policy makers at all levels of government.

"How To" Guides

More and more materials are now being published as the nation moves further along into the energy crisis. A couple that appear to be constructive and well planned are:

- Citizen Action Guide to Energy Conservation. Available at $1.75 a copy from the U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. (Order Stock No. 4000-00300)
- The Economy of Energy Conservation in Educational Facilities. Available at $2 a copy from Educational Facilities Laboratories, Inc., 477 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

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